

## Community resources

[Follow us on Twitter](#) [Check our Reddit](#) [Twitter this](#) [Digg this page](#) [Contact us on IRC](#)

*courage is contagious*

## Viewing cable 08TELAVIV2247, U.S./IS DIALOGUE ON LEBANON: SUPPORT MODERATES,

If you are new to these pages, please read an introduction on the [structure of a cable](#) as well as how to [discuss them](#) with others. See also the [FAQs](#)

### Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

### Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#08TELAVIV2247**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
<a href="#">08TELAVIV2247</a>	<a href="#">2008-09-29 12:05</a>	<a href="#">2011-08-30 01:44</a>	<a href="#">SECRET</a>	<a href="#">Embassy Tel Aviv</a>

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/9097>  
<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/9096>  
<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/9097>  
<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/9098>  
<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/9099>  
<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/9100>  
<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/9102>  
<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/9103>  
<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/9104>  
<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/9099>  
<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/9105>  
<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/9106>  
<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/9107>  
<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/9108>

VZCZCXYZ0000  
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHTV #2247/01 2731205  
ZNY SSSSS ZZH  
O 291205Z SEP 08  
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8646  
INFO RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY 4814

RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 5246  
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY 4458  
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY 2823  
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY 5219  
RUEHDO/AMEMBASSY DOHA PRIORITY 0875  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 2080  
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 2071  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0305  
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY 1461  
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY 6537  
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 0541  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 7523  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

S E C R E T TEL AVIV 002247

SIPDIS

NEA FOR PDAS FELTMAN; NSC FOR MCDERMOTT; DIA FOR ASMAR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/25/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PTER](#) [MARR](#) [IS](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [IR](#) [UN](#)

SUBJECT: U.S./IS DIALOGUE ON LEBANON: SUPPORT MODERATES,  
BUT DISAGREEMENT OVER HOW

Classified By: Ambassador James B. Cunningham. Reason 1.4 (B/D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On September 17, NEA Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for NEA Jeffrey Feltman chaired an Embassy Tel Aviv-Washington interagency delegation participating in the first joint U.S./Israeli dialogue on Lebanon at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in Jerusalem. Overall, the Israelis, while displaying a sophisticated analysis of Lebanon and Hizballah, maintained a focus on near-term security threats at the expense of a long-term plan to neutralize Hizballah, stabilize Lebanon, and prevent further conflict. Both sides agreed that Hizballah has made political gains and has continued to rearm since the passage of UNSCR 1701 in August 2006, and that it is critical to support and strengthen the moderates in Lebanon, led by March 14. Contrary to U.S. analysis, the GOI perceived the Doha Agreement and subsequent Lebanese cabinet statement as significant setbacks for moderates in Lebanon. The Israelis were skeptical that Hizballah could be constrained via internal Lebanese politics. Israel encouraged direct USG support for March 14 over GOL institutions, fearing Hizballah could come to control the latter. On UNSCR 1701, the Israeli delegation said that issues like Ghajar, the Sheba'a farms, and overflights were peripheral and should only be addressed within a broader context that emphasized ending arms transfers from Syria to Lebanon, strengthening UNIFIL, and disarming Hizballah. Feltman urged a focus on both ending arms transfer and preventing Hizballah from using the arsenal it already has. On Ghajar, he noted that a resolution would not be a victory for Hizballah, but would remove a card already in its hand that could be used as an excuse to resume hostilities with Israel. The IDF and MFA were uncomfortable with what they described as UNIFIL's "trust us" approach on Ghajar, but were intrigued by Feltman's question as to whether supplemental U.S. assurances might help bridge some gaps. END SUMMARY.

-----  
GOI: March 14 in Lebanon heroic, but failing  
-----

¶2. (C) Nimrod Barkan, Director of the MFA Center for Political Research (INR A/S equivalent) laid out Israel's analysis of the current situation in Lebanon, beginning with the premise that "the situation in Lebanon is not a result of what Israel does or does not do." Barkan said the GOI foresees a Shia demographic majority in Lebanon within ten years, and believes the "March 14 moment" to be temporary. "We foresee a March 8-Hizballah majority after the 2009 elections." Nonetheless, the United States and Israel should work to support moderates and to capitalize on Hizballah's Lebanese identity to restrain its influence and autonomy,

including its ability to unilaterally initiate hostilities with Israel. Barkan said the GOI had interpreted the Doha Agreement and the August 2008 cabinet statement as victories for Hizballah that further legitimized its "resistance" credo and strengthened its influence over the Lebanese government, commenting that March 14 should have compromised before the May 2008 violence when it was stronger relative to Hizballah. March 14 is "courageous" but neutered. "Their participation in the welcoming ceremonies for Samir Quntar was their final acquiescence." Additionally, while March 8 is succeeding in peeling away March 14 members like Walid Jumblatt domestically, Hizballah is also gaining regional acceptance. "They were invited to Cairo, they are talking with the Jordanians." Additionally, Barkan expressed concern that the August 2008 Lebanese cabinet statement seemed to authorize the downing of an Israeli plane overflying Lebanon, which would likely draw an Israeli military response. "If a pilot is lost, all hell will break loose." However, Barkan praised President Michel Sleiman, saying "he's not Lahoud, he's not a Syrian puppet, and he's not working under Hizballah diktat."

13. (C) Barkan admitted that Israel's bellicose rhetoric

threatening to hold the Lebanese state responsible for Hizballah's actions was aimed at deterring Hizballah aggression. He understood the U.S. perspective on the need to distinguish between the state and Hizballah in any future conflict, but Barkan's view may not reflect policy makers' views. Feltman emphasized the need to strengthen Lebanese security services as counterweights and alternatives to Hizballah, especially to counter Michel Aoun's argument that Lebanon's Christian minority should ally itself with the Shia minority for protection in a "Sunni sea." Barkan disagreed, arguing that support for the LAF was meaningless, as the LAF would never confront Hizballah directly and might eventually fall under its control. Barkan suggested instead that the Lebanese Internal Security Forces (ISF) should be strengthened as a "Sunni militia," but seemed to contradict himself when he said later that Saudi Arabia's policy of arming Sunni groups in Lebanon was "bankrupt."

14. (C) PDAS Feltman shared the U.S. analysis that "we are better off in Lebanon now than in June 2006," noting that Hizballah is now extremely unlikely to initiate the kind of cross-border attack that sparked the 2006 war, but acknowledging that Hizballah would still like to hit Israel "without crossing a red line," including via targeting overflights or IDF troops in northern Ghajar. Feltman pointed out that Hizballah's arms are now being discussed via the National Dialogue, and that most Lebanese agree that an autonomous Hizballah is a danger to Lebanon. Doha placed further constraints on Hizballah and took political disputes off the street and into the cabinet and parliament, where PM Siniora and March 14 currently hold an advantage.

-----  
Hizballah strong, but can be restrained  
-----

15. (C) LTC Etay Shapira of the Israeli Defense Intelligence (IDI) followed Barkan with an assessment of Hizballah's military strength. Acknowledging that the IDF bases its conclusions on "intelligence" whereas UNIFIL and the UN demand "evidence," Shapira asserted that Hizballah has not relinquished the south, as UNIFIL Commander Graziano asserts, but has adapted to the presence of UNIFIL and the LAF by maintaining a lower profile. "The LAF and UNIFIL interpret UNSCR 1701 as meaning 'no weapons in public.'" IDI believes that the Hizballah has 20,000 rockets south of the Litani, but UNIFIL cannot find them without entering homes, which it is unwilling to do without LAF consent. Shapira noted that even if UNIFIL requested permission to enter homes, the LAF would tip off Hizballah. Shapira also cited "very good intelligence," but not proof, that Hizballah has built "underground cities" inside the UNIFIL zone, including command and control centers, barracks, and firing positions. As Hizballah rearms, the IDI noted that Israel is less concerned with the number of weapons and more concerned with

their increasing sophistication. The IDI assess that Hizballah's anti-aircraft weapons can hit Israeli helicopters or unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV's), but not yet manned aircraft. They also believe Hizballah's medium-range missiles are more accurate, allowing Hizballah to attack specific targets in Tel Aviv, and that the "surprise" promised by Nasrallah in the event of another conflict could be a missile strike on Israel's nuclear facility at Dimona.

¶6. (C) Shapira acknowledged that newly-appointed LAF Commander Jean Kahwaji was "not Hizballah's first choice," but that his appointment would not change the LAF's overall posture toward Hizballah.

¶7. (C) Hizballah has grown in military strength, Barkan noted, adding that Hizballah's biggest constraint is its "Lebanese" (as opposed to "Iranian" or "Jihadi") identity, which implies a need to maintain cross-confessional alliances. While Jihadis in the movement continue to press

for more aggression against Israel, Hizballah leadership wants neither civil war nor another massive Israeli attack. Hizballah is also being reined in by Iran, which does not want Hizballah drawn into a conflict with Israel until Iran has achieved a nuclear weapons capability. Barkan argued that every Israeli strike on Lebanon since Operation Accountability in 1993 has improved security along Israel's northern border by establishing a stronger and stronger Israeli deterrent. Nonetheless, Barkan emphasized that Hizballah will "never" give up its arms and wants to "reestablish a balance of terror," including by avenging the death of Imad Mughniya. "Their list of potential excuses goes well beyond Sheba'a Farms and Israeli overflights." Therefore, returning Sheba'a would merely strengthen Hizballah, weaken Israel, and do nothing to help Lebanese moderates.

¶8. (S) PDAS Feltman agreed that Hizballah's Lebanese identity is the best way to constrain Hizballah politically and militarily. "Hizballah has adopted the veneer of a nationalist movement, and to maintain it they need support beyond their Shia base." Because the Sunnis will never support Hizballah, it relies on Michel Aoun for Christian cover and national influence. In the 2009 parliamentary elections, a few key Christian districts will decide the election. Therefore, the United States wants to support President Sleiman and the LAF to marginalize Aoun in the 2009 elections, because marginalizing Aoun would hurt Hizballah. However, Feltman noted that "all bets are off" if Iran orders Nasrallah to strike Israel, and that Nasrallah's threats to target Israeli overflights should be taken seriously. "Nasrallah tends to be very transparent."

----- --  
Next Steps: Implementing 1701, including Ghajar  
----- --

¶9. (C) To maintain pressure on Hizballah, Deputy Director General (DDG) for International Organizations (IO A/S equivalent) Eviatar Manor recommended a renewed push by Israel and the United States for fuller implementation of UNSC 1701. The U.S. and Israel have a shared interest to preserve calm in south Lebanon, improve Israel's deterrence against Hizballah, strengthen UNIFIL, and fully implement UNSC 1701. Unfortunately, Manor asserted, "the UN and Europeans have focused on peripheral issues like Ghajar, Sheba'a, and overflights," hoping that Israeli concessions will somehow strengthen Lebanese moderates. Instead, he urged that attention be focused on Hizballah's rearmament and defiance of the weapons-free zone in south Lebanon. Relatively new to the Lebanon portfolio, Manor later acknowledged that many of his concrete recommendations (push the LAF to toughen up, make UNIFIL more assertive, convince the Europeans of the Hizballah threat, do more to prevent weapons transfers across the Syrian-Lebanese border, including by implementing recommendations of the two reports of the Lebanon Independent Border Assessment Team (LIBAT)) had been the focus of U.S. and Israeli efforts since 2006, to

little or no avail. Alon Barr, FM Livni's chief of staff, suggested that UNSCR 1747's prohibitions on arms transfers by Iran and the attendant UN sanctions committee could be another avenue to attack the problem of Hizballah rearmament.

¶11. (S) Feltman disagreed with Manor's assertion that Ghajar, Sheba'a, and overflights were "peripheral" issues, noting that Sheba'a has become a national issue, with PM Siniora and others arguing that "resistance by diplomacy" was a preferable means to "liberate" Lebanese territory. "They're challenging Hizballah's monopoly on the meaning of 'resistance' and Hizballah's assertion that force is the only way to deal with Israel. The Lebanese publicly refuse to negotiate with Israel, but in fact, they're negotiating with Israel already over Ghajar via the LAF-UNIFIL-IDF tripartite

mechanism. We can help Siniora and his allies and undermine Hizballah by demonstrating that diplomacy works. Ghajar is a good place to start. This would be a victory for moderates and a defeat for Hizballah." Feltman encouraged the GOI to accept Lebanon's response to the UNIFIL proposal (August 22, 2008) for IDF withdrawal from northern Ghajar and asked whether additional assurances from the USG, to supplement the UNIFIL plan and Lebanon's written response, would help allay Israeli concerns over UNIFIL's protection of the Syrian Alawites who now hold Israeli citizenship in northern Ghajar and the timing of a UNIFIL-LAF handover. Feltman also stressed the importance of countering the narrative that was established in Lebanon after the Israeli prisoner exchange with Hizballah -- a deal which led many Lebanese to conclude that Hizballah and Israel are colluding.

¶11. (C) LTC Vered Pollak of the IDF/J5 Middle East Division emphasized that the main Israeli interest in northern Ghajar is the prevention of a security vacuum in a town straddling the Blue Line, noting it was a nexus for smuggling and at least one attempted attack on IDF troops pre-2006. LTC Pollak emphasized that Israel has no interest in being north of the Blue Line if these concerns are addressed. Rather, Israel has a strategic interest in withdrawing from all Lebanese territory in accordance with UNSC resolutions. She referred to UNIFIL Force Commander Graziano's proposal of August 22, 2008 as "very thin" and said the IDF wants specific guarantees on the security and final disposition of the residents of northern Ghajar. She noted that the IDF believes that the Lebanese want the opposite: a temporary agreement to secure IDF withdrawal without references to a more permanent solution. DDG Manor complained that, when Israel asked for specific details pertaining to civil and security arrangements, UNIFIL's answer was "trust us."

¶12. (C) Feltman also noted that some use of the concept of armistice, but not necessarily the details of the 1949 Israel-Lebanon Armistice Agreement abrogated in 1967, could be used to create a "positive agenda" between Israel and Lebanon. "The Armistice still has positive connotations in Lebanon. It is referenced in the Taif Accord and Siniora's seven point plan. Hizballah cannot oppose it." Feltman noted that Lebanese leaders such as Siniora have noted that using the cover of "armistice" would allow more creative approaches on the Lebanese side. A revived Israel-Lebanon Mixed Armistice Commission (ILMAC) with a UN role might be a useful cover for more meaningful Israeli-Lebanese discussions. (NOTE: In a subsequent meeting, Barkan told PolCouns that our armistice proposal was intriguing, but warned that Israel has concerns about allowing the UN to take a mediating role. END NOTE.)

-----  
Next Steps: Supporting the Moderates  
-----

¶13. (C) DDG Barkan concluded that Israel's sole objective in Lebanon was to weaken Hizballah and postulated that this exclusive focus may explain why Israeli policy does not always track with the U.S. desire to strengthen the institutions of the Lebanese state. Feltman interjected that the U.S. policy of strengthening state institutions was aimed



precisely at weakening Hizballah. LTC Pollak noted that the IDF does not see the LAF as part of the "moderate camp" but rather as a reflection of Lebanese society. "Weapons provided to the LAF by the United States are more likely to be turned on Israel than Hizballah. At a minimum, there should be clear benchmarks for U.S. support to the LAF that require them to better implement UNSC resolutions, including by securing the border and going after Hizballah."

¶14. (C) PDAS Feltman reiterated that the U.S. and Israel shared goals of protecting Israel while building a strong, secure Lebanese state. "We must build a state that is an

alternative to Hizballah and shows Christians they can be protected without pandering to Hizballah. The LAF is loved and respected by the Lebanese public, and will gain influence at the expense of Hizballah if it is proven capable, credible, and backed by international support." Barkan agreed, noting that Israel had always had more success dealing with strong unitary actors like Egypt and Jorda -- but including Hamas in Gaza -- than weak states and non-state actors.

-----  
Taking Syria out of the Equation  
-----

¶15. (C) The Israeli side emphasized that Syria remains an important factor in Lebanon, but agreed that a return to Syrian hegemony would be no panacea. Barkan dismissed as nonsense the notion that Israel wanted to return Lebanon to Syrian control. Feltman said he was relieved to hear that, and asked that Israel keep U.S. interests in mind during its talks with Syria. "Your security is a priority for us, but we also have independent interests in Lebanon that would be undermined by another conflict or a Syrian return." Barkan said that while Lebanese President Michel Sleiman is "not a Syrian puppet," he understands that Syria's enemies in Lebanon do not live long, adding that Israel went out of its way ("perhaps too far") to assure to Syria during the 2006 war that it would not be attacked. Feltman asked why Israel was not holding Syria responsible for its support to Hizballah and other violent actors in Lebanon. Barkan noted Israel is trying to pull Syria away from Iran. "Even if Syria does not reform its behavior after an agreement, it can be convinced to limit support for Hizballah and stay out of any Israeli conflict with Iran." IDF representatives viewed Lebanon as a permanent problem, but argued that Syria can be fixed. Barkan further noted that the subject of Syrian weapons transfers to Hizballah had only recently been included in Israeli proximity talks with Syria. LTC Shapira noted that, separately, Israel had passed "strong messages" to Syria via France and the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) that transfers of advanced surface-to-air missiles and accurate long-range surface-to-surface missiles to Hizballah would cross Israeli red lines. "But we acknowledge that Syria might not be left out of the next war."

¶16. (U) U.S. Participants in PDAS Feltman's delegation included:

Ms. Meghan McDermott, NSC/NESA Director for Syria and Lebanon  
Mr. Amir Asmar, Senior Intelligence Officer, Office of Middle East  
and North Africa, Defense Intelligence Agency  
Mr. Matthew Irwin, NEA Lebanon Desk Officer  
Mr. Marc Sievers, Political Counselor  
Col. John Chere, U.S. Army Attach  
Mr. Peter Vrooman, Deputy Political Counselor  
Mr. Michael Honigstein, Political Officer

¶17. (U) Israeli Participants included:

Yosef "Yossi" Gal, Senior Deputy Director General (DDG), MFA  
Eviator Manor, DDG for UN and International Organizations  
Division, MFA  
Nimrod Barkan, DDG and Head of the Center for Policy  
Research, MFA

Yacov Hadas-Handelsman, DDG Middle East and Peace Process  
Division, MFA  
Barukh Binah, DDG, North America Division, MFA  
Alon Barr, Chief of Staff to the Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Tal Becker, Policy Advisor to the Minister of Foreign Affairs  
David Siegel, Director for UN Political Affairs, MFA  
Dan Arbell, Director of North America Department, MFA  
Yifat Amedi, Middle East Affairs Department, MFA  
LTC Vered Pollak, Head of Middle East Division of the IDF/J5

(Strategic Affairs)  
LTC Etay Shapira, IDI

118. (U) PDAS Feltman cleared this message.

\*\*\*\*\*  
Visit Embassy Tel Aviv's Classified Website:  
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/telaviv>

You can also access this site through the State Department's  
Classified SIPRNET website.

\*\*\*\*\*  
CUNNINGHAM